

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

EB-07 AGR-05 COME-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IO-10 SIL-01

LAB-04 /089 W

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R 201614Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 398

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2633

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: VIEWS OF EX-FONMIN BATRES

BEGIN SUMMARY: EX-FONMIN BATRES IS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE MANY COMPLEX PROBLEMS CONFRONTING HONDURAS. HE SAID THE PROBLEMS INCLUDE A SERIOUS ECONOMIC SITUATION, AGRARIAN UNREST, UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FUTURE RELATIONS WITH U.S. FRUIT COMPANIES, THE DISPUTE WITH EL SALVADOR AND A LACK OF GOVERNMENT DEFINITION. HE HOPES THAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE COUNTRY BUT FEARS THAT PRESENT CONDITIONS COULD EVENTUALLY LEAD TO POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHAOS. END SUMMARY.

1. POLOFF HAD LONG CONVERSATION WITH EX-FONMIN CESAR A. BATRES ON MORNING OF JUNE 19. BATRES SAID THAT HONDURAS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A POOR COUNTRY BUT IS TODAY SUFFERING EVEN MORE FROM A COMPLEX OF SEEMINGLY INSOLUABLE PROBLEMS. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE COUNTRY IS FACING A SERIOUS ECONOMIC SITUATION, AGRARIAN UNREST, UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FUTURE RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. FRUIT COMPANIES, THE DISPUTE WITH EL SALVADOR AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, A LACK OF GOVERNMENTAL DEFINITION. HE SAID THAT A LACK OF DEFINITION HINDERED THE RESOLUTION OF THE OTHER OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS. HE  
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ALSO REMARKED THAT THE UNITED BRANDS BRIBERY SCANDAL HAD CONTRIBUTED TO A BAD PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATION IN WHICH "NOBODY TRUSTED ANYBODY".

2. HE CONTRASTED THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WITH THE PREVIOUS REGIME IN WHICH GENERAL LOPEZ WAS ABLE TO MAKE FINAL DECISIONS BECAUSE HE WAS IN CONTROL OF THE ARMED FORCES. HE STATED THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS CONTROLLED BY YOUNG INEXPERIENCED COLONELS IN THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL, BUT THAT THERE ARE NO RECOGNIZED LEADERS IN THE COUNCIL. HE SAID THAT A COLLEGIAL FORM OF GOVERNMENT HADN'T WORKED IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD AND WOULDN'T WORK IN HONDURAS. BATRES BELIEVES THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION COULD LEAD TO DISSENSION AND CONFRONTATION WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES IF RIVAL OFFICERS START TO CONTEND FOR POWER.

3. HE OBSERVED THAT COMMUNIST FORCES ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE PRESENT UNSETTLED CONDITIONS TO MAKE INROADS IN THE UNIVERSITY, LABOR UNIONS AND CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE TRADITIONAL LIBERAL AND NATIONALIST PARTIES DO NOT HAVE THE TYPE OF LEADERSHIP NEEDED TO INSPIRE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE PARTIES. HE REMARKED THAT AS LONG AS RICARDO ZUNIGA CONTROLLED THE NATIONALISTS AND MODESTO RODAS THE LIBERALS THERE WOULD BE LITTLE CHANGE FOR NEW LEADERSHIP TO EMERGE. HE SAID THAT IDEALLY THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CALL FOR ELECTIONS WITHIN A CERTAIN TIME TO BRING ABOUT A RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT, BUT HE DOUBTED THE LT. COLONELS WOULD ACCEPT SUCH A SCHEME WITH THE PRESENT PARTY LEADERSHIP.

4. BATRES EMPHASIZED THAT LACK OF RESPECT FOR THE LAW HAD BECOME WIDESPREAD WITH MANY COMPLETELY DISREGARDING THE LAW'S PROVISIONS, AS HAD HAPPENED IN THE RECENT LAND INVASIONS. HE SAID THIS DISRESPECT IS COMBINED WITH A LACK OF FAITH IN THE GOVERNMENT. HE REMARKED THAT HONDURAS NEEDS A STRONG GOVERNMENT WITH AUTHORITY TO CARRY OUT NECESSARY AND RATIONAL PLANS EVEN THOUGH THOSE PLANS WERE SUBJECTED TO RELENTLESS CRITICISM.

5. BATRES SAID HE ADVISED CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR TO TAKE ACTION TO DEFINE HIS AUTHORITY VIS-A-VIS THE SUPERIOR  
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DEFENSE COUNCIL SO THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD ACT. ACCORDING TO BATRES, MELGAR DOES NOT WANT TO RETAIN HIS POSITION AT ALL COSTS AND IS UNWILLING TO REMAIN AS A SPOKESMAN OR FIGUREHEAD. BATRES SAID MELGAR WOULD RAISE THE QUESTION OF HIS LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL TO DETERMINE IF HE IS TO BE A LEADER IN FACT AS WELL AS IN NAME. HE DID NOT KNOW WHEN MELGAR INTENDED TO PRESENT HIS VIEWS TO THE COUNCIL.

6. COMMENT: BATRES IS OBVIOUSLY DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE COUNTRY'S SEVERE DIFFICULTIES. HE IS PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING CLEAR POLICIES THAT WILL BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE UNSETTLED

CLIMATE OF OPINION AND THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE GOVERNMENT.  
HE HOPES THAT THE COUNTRY CAN SOLVE ITS PROBLEMS, BUT  
FEARS THAT PRESENT CONDITIONS, IF ALLOWED TO DEGENERATE,  
COULD LEAD TO POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHAOS.  
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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 26 AUG 1999  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, PERSONAL OPINION, POLITICAL SITUATION  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 20 JUN 1975  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1975TEGUCI02633  
**Document Source:** ADS  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** 11652 GDS  
**Errors:** n/a  
**Film Number:** D750216-0181  
**From:** TEGUCIGALPA  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
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**Line Count:** 116  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION ARA  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:**  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 10 SEP 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <10 SEP 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <05 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
06 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** <DBA CORRECTED> wfs 971028  
**Subject:** n/a  
**TAGS:** PINT, HO, (BATRES, CESAR A)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006